

10 Things I Wish I'd Understood Knew When I was Almost Done With Alcohol

A thoughtful guide for when you know something needs to change, but you're not quite ready to say **never again**



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Introduction

I was almost done with alcohol more times than I can remember.

So many mornings after. And then the afternoons would creep up on me with that looming question:

Am I going to drink again tonight?

I remember the anxiety in my gut as I simultaneously hated what I was doing and poured myself a drink.

Nothing intellectual or logical held any weight in those moments. I knew alcohol was bad for me. But nothing felt as important as the feeling I knew I could get from that first drink.

Relief.

The inner battle was over. I could stop thinking about it and stop fighting with myself. And as that relief kicked in, so did all the reasons to keep drinking.

It was in those moments that I embedded the experience, and therefore the belief, in my body and mind that alcohol had something extremely important to offer me.

Imagine never being able to feel that again.

This is why we can be almost done with alcohol for decades.

Stuck in the Middle

The Uncomfortable Middle

Being almost done can be a hard place to live.

When you're all in, you have to accept the rough with the smooth. You likely bounce back quicker from the negatives because you rationalise that the juice was worth the squeeze.

But when the juice starts to sour, it becomes harder to swallow.

When the maths stops adding up

- The aftertaste lingers after every big night.
- The anxiety feels harder to ignore.
- The promises to yourself start carrying more weight.
- And eventually, the maths stops adding up.

You're still getting something from alcohol. If you weren't, this wouldn't be difficult.

But increasingly, what you're getting doesn't seem worth what you're paying.

That is the uncomfortable middle.

Choices

You probably don't need more facts about why you should drink less. And you already have plenty of lived experience telling you alcohol is not the perfect partner you once thought it was.

So how does almost done transform into positive action that feels manageable?

That is what this booklet is designed to help you explore. It isn't designed to convince you of anything, nor prescribe one way forward.

Instead, I want to offer some signposts and guidance that might reduce the frustration and confusion that live in the almost done experience.

Here are ten things I wish I'd understood earlier — things that might help you understand why you can be stuck between wanting to stop and wanting to keep drinking, and what may be waiting for you if you decide you're curious enough to explore further.

I • The Value Alcohol Holds for You

If alcohol had no value to you, giving it up wouldn't feel difficult. It can feel very uncomfortable when you know something isn't good for you, but you do it anyway — especially when you're competent in most other areas of your life.

You know how to make decisions. You can be disciplined. You solve problems. You show up. You get things done. So alcohol can feel baffling.

Why am I doing this when I know better?
We can very quickly turn that question into criticism:

I should be able to stop.
What is wrong with me?
I should have more self-control

But there's a much more useful place to begin. **Alcohol still holds value for you.** That doesn't mean it is objectively valuable. It means your mind and body have learned that drinking can create an experience you value.

The Human Drinking Project™ describes this as alcohol becoming psychologically significant because it becomes associated with a desired emotional experience. Over time, we can become attached not simply to the drink, but to what we believe the drink provides.



What might alcohol be giving you?

- Relief from stress or tension
- A signal that the working day is over
- A quieter, less busy mind
- Confidence, connection, or feeling carefree
- A reward you feel you've earned
- Permission to stop trying so hard for a while



CONSIDER: What do I believe alcohol gives me that I'm frightened I won't be able to get without it? Don't rush to make the answer sensible. Write down what is actually true.

2 · How Much Space Is Alcohol Taking Up?

The impact of alcohol isn't measured only in glasses. For a long time, I focused on how much I drank. But there is another measure that can tell us something important:

How much space does alcohol occupy in your mind?

The drinking itself

Thinking about drinking. Thinking about not drinking. Deciding tonight will be different.

The rules

Setting rules. Changing the rules. Comparing your drinking with other people's. Planning which nights you can drink.

The watching

Trying not to drink too early. Worrying about how much is left in the bottle. Watching the clock creep towards the time when the negotiation starts again.

The morning after

Waking up regretting it. Promising yourself you'll do better. Wondering whether you have a problem.

This mental exhaustion is central to the experience of many high-functioning people questioning their drinking. On the outside, life may continue perfectly well. On the inside, there is a private conversation taking up far more bandwidth than anyone else knows.

Alcohol doesn't have to be creating catastrophic consequences to be taking something valuable from you. It may simply be taking too much of your attention.

- ❏ **CONSIDER:** For the next week, don't change anything. Just notice. How often does alcohol enter my thoughts? And then ask: What could I do with all that mental space if this conversation was no longer happening?

3 · The Job You've Given Alcohol

What are you actually reaching for when you reach for a drink?

One of the most useful shifts in my own thinking was moving away from
towards What am I expecting alcohol to do for me? Why do I want alcohol?

Because over time, alcohol can acquire jobs. In The Human Drinking Project™, I call this **Alcohol Gets A Job™**.

Help me relax

Switch off after a long day.
Stop thinking. Finally
exhale.

Help me socialise

Feel confident. Connect.
Celebrate. Have fun.

Help me cope

Get through this. Reward
myself. Manage what feels
unmanageable.

Alcohol gets a job when it becomes the fastest, most reliable way of creating a feeling or experience that we no longer believe we can reliably create for ourselves. And it can be a very good employee, at least initially. It turns up quickly. It does what we expect. It is socially endorsed. No training required.

But as the years pass, we can give this employee more and more responsibility, even while its performance starts deteriorating and the costs begin rising.

The problem isn't simply removing alcohol. It's that we may have forgotten how to perform some of those jobs without it. The work isn't firing alcohol. The work is bringing those jobs back in-house.

❏ **CONSIDER:** Next time you really want a drink, pause and ask: What am I expecting this drink to do for me? Then: What do I actually need right now? Those two answers may not be the same.

4 · Why Knowing Better Isn't Enough



You can know exactly what alcohol is doing and still want a drink. This used to drive me mad. I knew alcohol wasn't helping me. I understood the health consequences. I knew it affected my sleep. I had evidence.

And yet there were still evenings when none of that information seemed to matter.

This makes more sense when we understand that the brain doesn't simply repeat what is healthy. **It repeats what appears to work.**

- If you feel stressed and drink and experience relief, your brain notices: Remember this.
- If you feel socially uncomfortable, drink and suddenly feel more confident: Remember this.
- If you've been holding everything together all day, drink and finally feel yourself exhale:

Remember this.

Repeated experiences create learning. Eventually, the situation itself can begin triggering the expectation of the reward — five o'clock, Friday, the kitchen, the hotel bar, dinner, the sound of the cork.

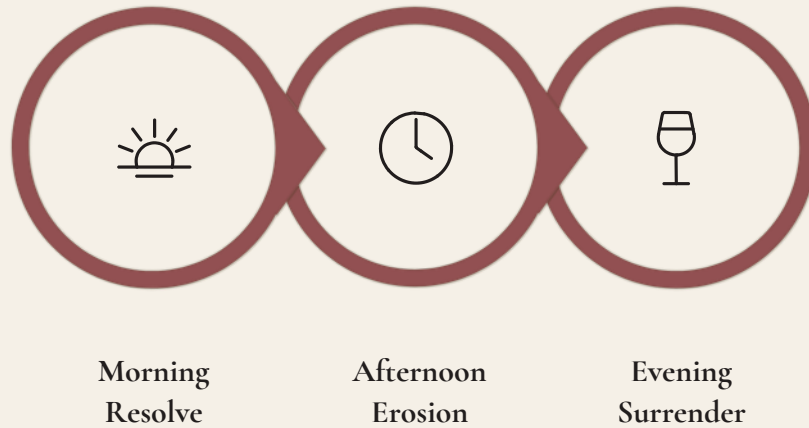
The Human Drinking Project™ describes this as the **learning loop**, where expectation gradually becomes part of the habit itself.

So you can simultaneously know I don't want to drink tonight and feel I really want a drink. Those two experiences are not evidence that you're ridiculous or weak. They are evidence that different systems are operating at the same time.

❏ **CONSIDER:** Instead of asking Why am I doing this again? try: What pattern is playing out right now? What time is it? What happened beforehand? What am I feeling? What am I expecting? You aren't trying to catch yourself doing something wrong. You're learning how the pattern works.

5 · The Hidden Cost of the Negotiation

Alcohol can start costing you long before you pour the first drink.



The daily negotiation

You wake up and decide you aren't drinking tonight. And you mean it. Then the day happens.

- By lunchtime, the conviction has softened.
- By late afternoon, another voice appears.
- It's been a big day. Maybe I'll just have one. I don't drink as much as some people. I'll stop tomorrow. I'll start properly next week.

Eventually you drink. And something fascinating happens. For a moment, you feel better. The argument has stopped. Decision made. Relief.

The deeper cost: self-trust

But underneath it, something else can begin. Disappointment. Because tomorrow you have to face the person you made the promise to. You.

This is where drinking can begin to affect something much bigger than health: **self-trust**.

Identity Drift™ describes the gradual movement away from our values and intentions as repeated behaviours begin leading our decisions. A promise broken may seem tiny in isolation, but repeated often enough, these moments can quietly widen the gap between the person we are living as and the person we know ourselves capable of becoming.

This isn't a moral judgement. It's a relationship. Your relationship with yourself.

📌 **CONSIDER:** When you tell yourself I'm not drinking tonight – do you trust the decision? Or does another part of you immediately think: We'll see. If your self-trust has taken a few knocks, that doesn't mean it's gone. It means it needs rebuilding.

6 · What Are You Afraid of Losing?

Sometimes the idea of life without alcohol feels harder than continuing to drink. You contemplate not drinking and suddenly your brain leaps twenty years into the future.

Freedom

If you can't imagine a holiday without alcohol, perhaps alcohol has become part of your experience of freedom.

Connection

If a dinner party without drinking sounds unbearable, perhaps alcohol has become responsible for connection or confidence.

Reward

If Friday night feels empty without it, perhaps alcohol has become synonymous with reward.

Rest

If you can't imagine relaxing without a glass in your hand, perhaps alcohol has become responsible for rest.

These aren't silly questions. They're actually quite revealing. Because hidden inside each fear may be another job alcohol has acquired. This is why I don't think we should dismiss these fears. We should listen to them. They tell us where alcohol has become important.

❏ **CONSIDER:** Complete this sentence: If I stopped drinking, I'm frightened I would lose... Write down everything. Even the things that sound trivial. Then ask: Is alcohol really the only way I can have these things? Not how will I replace them? Not yet. Just: Is it the only way? That tiny opening matters.

7 · Are You Waiting Until It's "Bad Enough"?

One of the strange things about alcohol is how often we look outside ourselves to decide whether our own experience is acceptable.

I'm not as bad as...

I don't drink every day.

I don't drink in the morning.

I still exercise. I'm doing well at work.

My family is fine.

Nobody has told me I need to stop.

We keep looking for evidence that we're allowed to continue. Or evidence that we're finally justified in stopping. But what if neither is necessary?

A different standard

Your drinking doesn't need to meet somebody else's definition of serious before you're allowed to decide you don't want it anymore.

This is especially relevant for people who are outwardly successful and functioning well. The absence of crisis can make it easy to keep postponing a decision, even when alcohol feels increasingly incongruent with how you want to live.

So perhaps the question isn't: ^{Is my} drinking bad enough?

Perhaps it's: Is this still good enough for me?

Alcohol doesn't have to be ruining your life to be making your life smaller.

❏ **CONSIDER:** Forget everyone else's relationship with alcohol. Imagine nobody else drank at all. Now ask: How do I feel about my own relationship with alcohol? And: Do I like what alcohol gives me enough to tolerate what comes with it?

8 · Who Are You Becoming?

Sometimes the biggest cost isn't what alcohol takes from today. It's the direction it quietly takes you in. Most of us imagine change as something dramatic. But often it happens in millimetres.



The small losses

A workout skipped. A morning lost. A difficult conversation avoided. A promise broken. A hobby neglected. A boundary not held. A plan postponed.



Identity Drift™

No single moment seems particularly important. But over time they can create distance between the way you're living and the person you know you could be. Identity Drift™ isn't measured by the number of drinks you consume. It's the gradual widening of the gap between your behaviour and your values.



Wanting more

More energy. More presence. More courage. More creativity. More connection. More adventure. More trust in yourself. Not simply a life with less alcohol. A life with more of you in it.

The discomfort isn't necessarily: Alcohol is destroying my life. It can be much quieter: This isn't who I want to be anymore. That sentence matters. Because it means your awareness is changing. Perhaps you're beginning to want more.

- ☐ **CONSIDER:** Think about yourself when you feel most like you — not your most productive self, not your most impressive self, your most aligned self. Is your relationship with alcohol taking you closer to that person or further away?

9 · Stop Trying to Solve Forever

Never again. Those two words carry extraordinary weight.

The weight of forever

- No wine on holiday.
- No champagne at a wedding.
- No cocktail overlooking the ocean.
- No drink at Christmas. Ever.

If you're already ambivalent about alcohol, asking yourself to make that decision today can create enormous resistance. So don't.

You don't have to solve forever. You can make a decision for long enough to gather new information.

Because right now, most of your evidence about life without alcohol may come from imagination. And imagination tends to focus on what will be missing — the wine, the ritual, the social ease, the reward, the relief.

The other side of the experiment

- What happens to your energy? Your sleep? Your mornings?
- Your anxiety? Your confidence? Your relationships?
- Your creativity? Your ability to manage difficult emotions?
- Your self-trust?
-

What happens when you navigate a holiday, dinner, celebration or awful day without needing alcohol and realise: I can do this.

The **90-Day Reset™** was built around this idea of creating space for change without requiring someone to arrive with a forever commitment.

You don't need to know what you'll want in ten years. You need enough space to discover what you want when alcohol is no longer making the decision with you.

📄 **CONSIDER:** Instead of Can I never drink again? try: Am I willing to explore what my life feels like without alcohol for long enough to learn something new? That's a different proposition entirely.

10 · What If Curiosity Is Enough?

You don't need certainty to begin.

I think many of us wait for a mythical moment. The morning when we wake up and suddenly feel completely done. No ambivalence. No fear. No desire. No doubt. We imagine we'll just know. Perhaps that happens for some people. But if you've been almost done for years, waiting to feel completely ready can become another way of remaining exactly where you are.

You have data You know what the first drink feels like. You know the relief. You know what happens after the second. You know the night, the sleep, the morning, the promise, the afternoon negotiation.	The experiment you haven't run What if the next experiment isn't another attempt to make drinking work differently? What if it's discovering what happens when you stop repeating the experiment you already know?	Curiosity over certainty Meaningful change begins when awareness replaces autopilot and curiosity replaces self-criticism. Curiosity doesn't demand that you know the answer. It asks you to be willing to look.
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And sometimes that is enough to begin.

☐ **CONSIDER:** Ask yourself: What might I discover about myself if alcohol stopped occupying this role in my life? Not only what might you lose. What might become possible?

So... How Done Are You?

There's no score here. This isn't a test to decide whether you have a drinking problem, and there's no pass or fail. Take a moment with each statement and simply notice your response.

Statement	Scale	
Alcohol still gives me something I value.	Not really	Very much
I spend more time thinking about alcohol than I'd like.	Not really	Very much
I've made rules about drinking that I regularly change or break.	Not really	Very often
Alcohol helps me change feelings or internal states I find difficult.	Not really	Very much
I'm frightened something important would be missing without alcohol.	Not really	Very much
My drinking increasingly conflicts with the person I want to be.	Not really	Very much
I'd feel relieved if I never had to negotiate with myself about alcohol again.	Not really	Absolutely

Now look at your answers. Not for a score. For information. You may still enjoy drinking. You may still value parts of it. You may not be ready to make a significant change. That's okay. But perhaps there's a more useful question than Should I quit drinking?

Try this one instead: What is alcohol giving me now, what is it costing me, and is that exchange still one I'm willing to make?

About Sarah

For years, I was the "together" one.

I was functioning. Working. Parenting. Exercising. Getting things done. From the outside, there was no dramatic alcohol story. Behind the scenes, there was a quiet and exhausting one.

I knew I didn't want to keep drinking the way I was drinking, but I kept finding myself back in the same cycle.

Drink. Regret. Promise. Negotiate. Drink.

What eventually fascinated me wasn't simply alcohol. It was why an intelligent person could desperately want to change something and simultaneously keep doing it. That question changed the direction of my work.

My work today

Today, as a coach and trained counsellor, my work goes deeper than simply helping people stop drinking. I'm interested in the human being underneath the behaviour.

- Why we seek relief.
- Why we repeat strategies that no longer serve us.
- Why we can know something intellectually and struggle to change it emotionally.
- How we rebuild self-trust.
- And what becomes possible when we stop organising our lives around the thing we've been trying so hard to control.

Because I don't believe the ultimate goal is simply to remove alcohol. The goal is to expand the life that becomes possible without it.

Sarah Connelly

Coach & Counsellor

Creator of The 90-Day Reset™

Founder, The Human Drinking Project™

What If You're Curious Enough to Find Out?

If you've reached the end of this and you're still not sure — good. The purpose was never to convince you. It was to help you understand the conflict a little better.

Because almost done isn't a lack of motivation. You can genuinely want two things at once. You can want to stop waking up disappointed in yourself and still want the relief of that first drink. You can know alcohol is costing you and still believe it's giving you something you can't get anywhere else. That isn't weakness. It's the whole reason this is hard.

Which is exactly why it gets more interesting the moment you stop making alcohol the enemy. Alcohol can be information. It can tell you what you've been reaching for, what you've been avoiding, and what you want your life to actually feel like.

Here's what most people who read something like this never find out. They recognise themselves on every page — and then they close it, and the week rolls on, and the negotiation starts again exactly where it left off.

You've already run the drinking experiment. Thousands of times. You know precisely how it ends — the relief, the second one, the sleep, the morning, the promise, and the afternoon it all begins again.

The one experiment you probably haven't run is a conversation with someone who isn't going to label you, talk you out of anything, or tell you what you should do — just help you see the pattern you've been standing too close to read.

That's the call.

Thirty minutes. Private. Free. We look at what alcohol is doing for you, what it's costing you, why the last few attempts didn't hold, and what you'd actually like your life to feel like from here. If my 90-Day Reset™ is the right next step for you, we'll talk about it. If it isn't, you'll leave with more clarity than you walked in with either way.

Book your free, private clarity call

No pressure. No labels. No forever declarations. Just the conversation you've been having alone — finally out loud.